



VINELAND

Historical and Antiquarian Society

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2019

The oldest local historical society in New Jersey, founded in 1864.

Cemetery Restoration Begins at Training School

In May, the Vineland Historical and Antiquarian Society received permission from Elwyn, Inc., the current owners, to clean up the abandoned cemetery that served as the final resting place for 169 residents of the former Vineland Training School. The Society worked with volunteers at the site for a full week and will continue to work at the cemetery each Tuesday through June until the grounds are completely restored. A lot of credit for the progress goes to Elwyn maintenance worker Jesse DeShields, who tackled a lot of the heavy work, as well as VHAS volunteers Sharon Garrison, Virginia Tamuts, Dorothy Wilhelm, Sandra Hearing, Marlene Vasilotti, Terry Scala and Laurie Milana. We also want to thank Gary Galloway of Rental Country, who generously donated the use of some heavy equipment to get the work done more quickly and efficiently. Curator Patricia A. Martinelli and retired VHAS Board member Jack Carr conceived the project after they visited the Training School grounds in March to take photographs. At almost the same time, Richard Berry, the executive director of Elwyn and his staff were discussing what they could do to restore the cemetery. The entire property is scheduled for sale and it is very likely that most—if not all—of the historic buildings there will be demolished. Martinelli said, “We’re hoping that the cemetery restoration will encourage the new owners to keep it safe for future generations.”



In early May, the cemetery was filled with small trees and shrubs, which had buried some of the tombstones.



After just a few weeks, substantial progress was made in clearing a lot of debris from the grounds thanks to a small group of dedicated volunteers.

From the Curator...

Well, where to begin? First, I want to thank all of the kind-hearted people who have donated to our museum restoration fund. We are currently organizing the work according to priority and will hopefully have more to report on that subject very soon. The needs of the museum were neglected for too many generations but I am optimistic that we can effect positive change. Second, I want to thank the public for making our programs such a success this year! Every presentation was standing room only and that makes us very happy. In addition to our constant supporters, we have made a lot of new friends this year—many of whom have become members of VHAS. In addition to everything we have planned for the remainder of this year, we are already looking ahead to 2020. While we held “A Celebration of Women” in 2018, we’re going to do our part to honor those local residents who participated in the suffrage movement. So, as you can see, we have been hard at work around here, doing our best to preserve the stories of the people who once called Vineland home. If you would like to learn more, I hope that you will come out for a tour of the museum some time soon—if you like what you see, perhaps you will consider becoming one of our volunteers!



From left, VHAS Board President Sandra Hearing watches as metal detectorists Bruce Matthews and Dan Garrison begin a scan of the museum grounds.



Map Goes Home to Hammonton

In April, this colorful engraving of a map of Hammonton, which apparently dates from the late 1850s, was discovered in the museum’s collections. It is possible that this map reflects the vision of Charles K. Landis and his business partner, Richard Byrnes, who began developing Hammonton at that time. It was donated in April to the Hammonton Historical Society so that it can take its rightful place among the collections there. Although it’s not in prime condition, the illustration is intact, so our friends at HHS will have much to study in the months ahead! Here at VHAS, we’re especially curious about the lovely lake that can be seen at the left side of the map.

Hours & Information

The Museum Office is open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 1 to 4 p.m. from February through December by appointment. The Museum exhibits are open to the public every Saturday during those months, except when a presentation is scheduled; tours are offered at 1, 2 and 3 p.m. There is no set admission fee for Saturday tours but donations are welcome. Please remember: Assistance with library and research facilities is available by appointment only. Call the Museum at **856.691.1111**; e-mail: vinelandhistory@gmail.com; Group and school tours are welcomed and encouraged to visit.

Society Honors Past Vineland Residents

In May, the Society honored two early local residents for their many contributions to their community. The first ceremony was held at Oak Hill Cemetery, where a headstone was unveiled at the grave site of Romeo Little, a well-respected early resident of Vineland. The new marker was installed by VHAS trustee Bill Hughes and local contractor Jack Adams. Hughes discovered the lack of a stone while researching Civil War veterans who are buried at the cemetery.

Little was born in North Carolina on July 20, 1840, to Sarah and Roden Little. During the Civil War, he served as a body servant and cook for Quartermaster Merrill of the Commissary Department of the Confederate Army. Freed after the war, he arrived in Vineland in January 1866 and was first employed on a farm on Elmer Road that was owned by Merrill. After meeting Maria Robinson while they both worked at the farm, the couple was married on September 8, 1867, and raised six children. Little was a member of the First United Methodist Episcopal Church on Landis Avenue for many years. After leaving the farm, he was later employed for ten years as a handyman by Dr. Charles R. Wiley, a Vineland physician. He was then hired by Senator Seaman Fowler as a handyman for the Baker House, Vineland's most prestigious hotel, where he remained for about thirty years. An active member of the community, Little was recognized by Vineland's Lyon Post 10 of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) on June 8, 1881, for serving as a water carrier on Decoration Day, later known as Memorial Day. He also served as the personal servant of Captain G.A. Cheever, the commander of Company K, Sixth Regiment of the New Jersey National Guard during a Civil War reunion encampment in Manasquan in August 1884. At one point, Little ran for the post of municipal pound keeper on the Republican ticket. He died at 91 years of age on March 8, 1932.

Later that same month, the Society partnered with Siloam Cemetery to unveil a commemorative marker at the gravesite of suffragist Portia Gage. The marker was placed as part of a nationwide effort by the National Women's History Project to locate the final resting place of women who worked hard to promote women's suffrage.

"Portia was the leader of the 172 women who staged the country's largest suffrage protest in American in 1868," said Patricia A. Martinelli, Society curator. "As a result, it was only logical to honor her first."

Vineland was the site of the first New Jersey Convention for Universal Suffrage in 1867, where speakers included Victoria Woodhull and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. They inspired local women to get involved in the fight for women's rights. Although they did not live to see their efforts rewarded, the first group of women paved the way for future generations, who continued their fight until the 19th amendment was passed in 1920. The Society and Siloam will continue to work together to document the graves of other suffragists who are buried in the cemetery.

Romeo Little (at left) during a GAR camp reunion in 1884 and Portia Gage were honored by the Society in May for their many contributions to Vineland.



Special Events Dominate VHAS Calendar

This year, the Vineland Historical and Antiquarian Society added a number of new programs that were very well received by local audiences. Each event so far has drawn a standing-room-only crowd, who enjoyed learning more about a wide range of topics. In February, trustee Nancy Steelman offered a presentation on the history of American quilt-making. The following month, Walter Lafty of the Old Baldy Civil War Roundtable, discussed the impact of the Civil War on the poetry of Walt Whitman. April saw two very diverse presentations: The first by Brittney Ingersoll, a curator at the Cumberland County Historical Society, was devoted to the history of Vineland's brothels. The second was presented by Dr. Virginia Perry, who recently compiled a cookbook on "Soul Food Cooking." The refreshments for that program were a selection of soul food desserts made from recipes in the cookbook. In May, the Society hosted a reception for educators from different Vineland schools who had been selected as "Teachers of the Year." The teachers were awarded a one-year honorary membership in the Society for their dedication to their profession. That same month, Robert Russo, another member of the Old Baldy Civil War Roundtable, spoke on "The Garden of Stone," a history of Arlington National Cemetery.



Clockwise from top left corner: Trustee Nancy Steelman explains the significance of quilts in America; Researcher Walter Lafty explores the impact of the Civil War on notes American poet Walt Whitman; Curator Brittney Ingersoll poses with special guests at her talk on brothels, the members of the Somewhere in Time Tea Society who came to the event dressed as 19th century dance hall girls; Dr. Virginia Perry (seated) shares vignettes from her new book on "Soul Food Cooking," which combines historic recipes and African-American History, assisted by her daughter, Midge Perry Spencer. These were just a few of the programs offered at the museum by the Society in 2019.